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Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6623rd meeting

Tuesday, 27 September 2011, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Mikati	(Lebanon)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Yang Tao
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Messone
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Under rule 39 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Before I give the floor to Mr. Pascoe, I should like to make some brief introductory remarks in my national capacity as the Prime Minister of Lebanon.

I am pleased to participate in this meeting today. I have come from a region where the winds of change are blowing. Indeed, yesterday the Palestinian Spring train left the station, with its people asking for an end to decades of historical injustice and continued occupation; appealing to the world to recognize the Palestinians' right to have, as do all the peoples of the world, an independent State on their land; and requesting that such a State take its normal and natural place as a full Member of the United Nations. This is but an expression of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination — a right that was endorsed by the General Assembly more than a quarter of a century ago.

Palestine, as all here may well know, meets all the criteria required to become a State under international law: a people, a land, a Government and the ability to establish relations with other States. But it is an occupied State, and we must therefore support the efforts of the State of Palestine and its people to end the occupation, achieve independence and return to their homeland.

The Palestinians have chosen negotiations over what have become known as final-status issues, namely, Jerusalem, refugees, security, borders, settlements and water. Those negotiations are still coming up against Israel's negativity and intransigence. The greatest danger to the future of peace on the land of Palestine is posed by Israel's practices — its violations of international law and of the resolutions of the United Nations. It continues its settlement activities, expelling people, demolishing homes and confiscating land as well as controlling water resources. It continues to build the separation wall and to change the geographic and demographic features of East Jerusalem, in an attempt to erase its Arab identity.

At their summit meeting held in Beirut in 2002, the Arabs unanimously adopted a strategic decision to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace. That decision later became known as the Arab Peace Initiative, which was launched by the Saudi monarch, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and endorsed by the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Such a comprehensive peace must also include the full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of international resolutions and under resolution 497 (1981), which declares null and void any act by Israel that changes the legal, physical or demographic status of the Golan.

In that context, Lebanon supports the right of Syria to recover all its occupied land. Lebanon, having witnessed the events in Syria today, reaffirms that it wishes to see the territorial integrity of Syria and its people and the safety and security of its citizens.

As far as Lebanon is concerned, a comprehensive peace requires a full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Lebanese territory in the south, especially the Shab'a farms, the Kfar Shuba hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village. In that context, we reaffirm Lebanon's commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) and all its provisions. We reiterate our call on the international community to bring pressure to bear on Israel to fulfil its obligations under the resolution, including full withdrawal; an end to its violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air; and transitioning from a halt in hostilities to a full ceasefire and complete cooperation with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in delineating the remainder of the Blue Line. Lebanon reaffirms its right to delineate its own maritime borders and to exploit the natural resources, especially oil and gas, in its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone.

Here, I pay tribute to the forces of UNIFIL and reiterate Lebanon's condemnation of all aggression

against them. I honour their sacrifices and affirm the ongoing cooperation and coordination between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL, which will always be welcome in the Lebanese South.

With respect to Lebanon's international relations, I confirm the statement made a few days ago by President Sleiman of the Lebanese Republic to the General Assembly, to the effect that Lebanon, a founding Member of the United Nations that respects the primacy of international law, is fully committed to respecting all resolutions of international legitimacy, including those relating to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, in accordance with the ministerial statements issued by successive Lebanese Governments.

We hope that the Security Council will always be a bulwark of defence of the weak against the strong and the victim against the usurper. Members of the Council may rest assured that Lebanon will always seek the path of justice towards peace and remain a land of freedom, convergence and moderation.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: More than a week of intensive diplomacy at the United Nations has underscored the institutional readiness of the Palestinian Authority to run a State and seen the Palestinian President apply for membership for a State of Palestine in the United Nations. The Quartet has noted this application, while calling for resumed negotiations and urging concrete proposals from the parties on territory and security within three months of talks resuming. The Quartet reaffirmed the international legal basis for the peace process and its support, expressed on 20 May, for the vision of Israeli-Palestinian peace outlined by President Obama. It also urged the parties to avoid provocations on the ground.

Judging by the passions of last week, the parties remain far apart. No one can deny the depth of their dispute, but there are now some building blocks in place that could help make negotiations more effective than before. These include a clear timetable, expectations that the parties must come forward with proposals, and an active role for the Quartet. It will not be easy to chart a way forward, but now is again the time for everyone to give diplomacy a chance.

Let me begin by noting an important international success story. The Palestinian Authority is capable of running a State. This strong international consensus was clear at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee on 18 September here in New York. The meeting confirmed the assessments of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process of the capability of the Palestinian Authority. The efforts to build robust State institutions and revive the Palestinian economy have brought real security and economic improvements. We commend President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad on this achievement. The Palestinian Authority has achieved what it set out to do two years ago, and this must be noted, preserved and built upon.

For this reason, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting urged greater facilitation by the Israeli Government, including enhanced measures to enable private sector growth in the West Bank and Gaza; continued, predictable and improved revenue transfers from Israel; and allowing Area C to develop. The meeting expressed concern over the fiscal situation, which many attributed to structural constraints on the private sector, while underscoring the importance of donor support to the Palestinian Authority. In this regard, I welcome the $200 million transferred by Saudi Arabia for the Palestinian Authority's recurrent expenditures and development spending. With a $150 million financing gap for the remainder of the year, additional and timely donor support to meet the Authority's needs is critical, including to ensure payment of salaries and contracts.

When meeting last Friday, Quartet principals stated that a donors conference should be held to give further impetus to the State-building agenda. They also proposed, as part of the context of renewed negotiations, to identify additional steps they can support individually and collectively so as to secure significantly greater independence and sovereignty for the Palestinian Authority over its affairs.

I stress the State-building achievements for a reason. The main obstacles to a Palestinian State are not institutional, but political: the unresolved issues in the conflict between the parties, the continuing Israeli occupation, and the ongoing Palestinian divide.

Last Friday, 23 September, President Abbas submitted to the Secretary-General an application for

membership for a State of Palestine in the United Nations. In accordance with the Charter and the rules of procedure, the Secretary-General transmitted the application to the President of the Security Council on the same day and sent a copy to the President of the General Assembly. The Secretary-General respects the prerogatives of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The application is now before the Council; it is members' issue to decide.

As these deliberations continue, we must spare no effort to help the parties back to the negotiating table. The Quartet will now work for a preparatory meeting of the parties within a month to agree on an agenda and a method of proceeding. Let me appeal to both parties to agree to move forward. The Quartet made clear that it would expect the parties to come forward with comprehensive proposals on territory and security within three months of resumed negotiations.

This would be a moment where the parties would be truly tested in their readiness to make serious proposals that address the core concerns of the other. It is also designed to ensure that the talks move quickly to the heart of the matters in dispute. The goal would be to make substantial progress within six months, with a Moscow conference held at the appropriate time, and to reach an agreement not later than the end of 2012.

Special Coordinator Serry played an active role with the other Quartet envoys and Quartet Representative Blair in developing this framework. As the Quartet has made clear, the parties should refrain from provocative actions if negotiations are to be effective. It has also reiterated the obligations of both parties under the Road Map.

Resuming negotiations and making progress is easier said than done, of course, and this was evident in the eloquent and deeply felt speeches of both leaders to the General Assembly. Yet despite frustrations and lack of trust, each leader extended his hand for peace, and both parties have undertaken to review carefully the Quartet call. We hope that, whatever its reservations, each side will now engage towards the preparatory meeting envisaged by the Quartet. The United Nations intends to be a full participant in this effort, and Special Coordinator Serry has already returned to the region to follow up with both parties and his Quartet partners.

I will not give a detailed report of developments on the ground this month in my briefing today, but I do wish to highlight a few key matters. During the reporting period, a total of two Palestinians were killed, including one militant, while 102 Palestinians, including 12 children, were injured, and two Israeli Defense Forces personnel and 10 Israeli civilians were injured, illustrating the continuing cost of the ongoing conflict.

In the current atmosphere, it is essential that all sides impress on their security forces and civilian populations the need to act responsibly. They must do their utmost to avoid escalation and take early action to defuse possible tensions. I commend the peaceful nature of the large public demonstrations held in support of the application for Palestinian membership in the main Palestinian cities in the West Bank.

Extremists on both sides must not be allowed to inflame the situation. The past month has seen an upsurge in Israeli settler violence, including, on 5 September, the fifth arson attack on a mosque in the past two months. The rule of law must be enforced by Israeli authorities against this phenomenon. Security must also be ensured for Israelis, as was underscored by a car and knife attack in Tel Aviv by a West Bank Palestinian on 29 August, and by Israeli reports that they had foiled a suicide attack in August in Jerusalem.

One hundred housing new units were approved in the Beit Aryeh settlement in the northern West Bank since the last briefing. The Israeli authorities also announced their intention to expropriate 200 acres of land around a settler outpost in the West Bank. More Palestinian structures in Area C have been demolished to date in 2011 than in either of the past two years. Today's decision by the Jerusalem District Planning Committee to advance planning for a large number of units in East Jerusalem is of particular concern. We have repeatedly stated that settlement activity is illegal and contrary to Israel's Road Map commitments.

In Gaza, despite the restoration of an uneasy calm in late August, 18 rockets, including three Grad rockets, were fired into Israel during the reporting period. We condemn these indiscriminate attacks, which must cease. During the same period, Israeli forces conducted four incursions and two airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in six Palestinian civilians being injured, including three children. We continue to urge Israel to show maximum restraint.

We also continue to call for further easing of Israeli closure measures on Gaza, particularly in regard

to the importation of construction materials, exports and the freedom of movement of people.

We can report no movement on Palestinian reconciliation based on Palestinian Liberation Organization commitments, although President Abbas stated that he hopes that the implementation of the reconciliation accord will be accelerated in the coming weeks. There also has been no progress regarding access to or the release of Staff Sergeant Shalit, who remains in Hamas captivity.

Allow me to comment briefly on Lebanon, where the overall security situation remained calm. On 20 September, in the West Bekaa, the Lebanese Internal Security Forces arrested four men and killed two others suspected to have links with the kidnappers of the seven Estonian nationals who had been abducted in March and released in July. The situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations has remained generally stable. However, UNIFIL's freedom of movement was impeded in an incident on 13 September in the vicinity of the village of Ayta ash-Sha'b, which resulted in the light injury of one UNIFIL soldier.

Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis, although at a diminished pace.

We welcome the strong commitment to the Special Tribunal expressed by President Suleiman in his address to the General Assembly (see A/66/PV.11) and reiterated by Prime Minister Mikati today.

In northern Lebanon, the United Nations continues to coordinate closely with the Government of Lebanon on the provision of assistance to displaced Syrian nationals, as well as on matters of protection and determination of their status. Their number, by our count, has reached 3,780 people.

The increase in Syrian nationals seeking refuge across the border is a reflection of the escalating political and human rights crisis in Syria, which has killed at least 2,700 people since March. The polarization continues to deepen between the Syrian Government, which appears determined to pursue its policy of violent repression despite international and regional calls to change course, and a growing popular opposition that has continued to organize protests across the country.

On 15 September, a coalition of Syrian opposition leaders announced the formation of a Syrian national council and released a national consensus charter affirming the peaceful, inclusive and non-sectarian character of the Syrian uprising and committing to the establishment of a modern State that will guarantee the rule of law and respect for human rights. We are aware of reports of increased defections from within the army and the continued violence against and mistreatment of activists and their supporters.

On 12 September, the President of the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed three experts to form the international commission of inquiry mandated by the Council on 23 August. They will meet this week in Geneva to discuss their programme and methods of work, and establish contacts with relevant stakeholders. We underlined the importance of accountability for all human rights violations committed in Syria since March, and hope that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic will extend full cooperation to the Commission.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.